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A POOR SALES PITCH?

The European Citizens' Initiative and Attitudes towards the EU in Germany and the UK

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Abstract:

Earlier research about the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) focused on its normative value, functioning mechanisms, and the extent to which citizens are willing to engage with it. So far, little efforts were made to investigate whether the ECI has an effect on citizens' attitudes. This article provides an empirical assessment about how knowledge about the ECI and the willingness to use it may enhance a positive image about the EU. The explanatory power of these two variables is tested against other determinants identified in the literature as sources of a positive image about the EU: democratic performance, perception of representation, the pursuit of interests, and citizenship. The study draws on an original dataset collected through a web-survey at the beginning of 2015. Results indicate a limited and sometimes counter-intuitive effect of the ECI on the image about the EU with several implications for the future of this participatory tool.

Keywords: ECI, knowledge, willingness to use, citizens, EU image

Introduction

In April 2012 the world's first tool of transnational participatory democracy, the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), entered into force. Introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon, the ECI allows European citizens to exercise their right to participate in the political system of the European Union (EU). In three years from its introduction, 51 initiatives had been presented to the European Commission out of which 31 got registered and only three can be seen as successful from a procedural point of view, i.e. they managed to collect more than one million signatures (Anglmayer 2015, p.9). The ECI received extensive scholarly attention and earlier studies highlighted its limitations and constraints (Maurer & Vogel 2009; Bouza Garcia et al. 2012), reflected on its potential impact to build up a European demos (Glogowski & Maurer 2013; Hatton 2014) or to strengthen the EU democratic system (Hierlemann & Wohlfarth 2010; Sangsari 2013), and referred to the factors leading to its use (Kentmen-Cin 2014). The common ground of these approaches is the extent to which citizens are encouraged (Monaghan 2012) and willing to engage with a mechanism that is

advertised by the European institutions as participatory. However, so far little efforts were made to investigate whether the ECI has an effect on citizens' attitudes.

To partly fill this void in the literature, this article provides an empirical assessment about how the ECI influences individual level attitudes. More precisely, we argue and test the extent to which knowledge about the ECI and the willingness to use it may enhance a positive image about the EU. The latter covers a broad set of the predicted effects that the ECI could have on individual perceptions, e.g. identification with the EU and the building up of a European demos, feeling better represented and thinking that the EU listens to the voice of its citizens. The explanatory power of these two variables is tested against other determinants identified in the literature as sources of a positive image about the EU: democratic performance, perception of representation, the pursuit of interests, and citizenship. The study draws on an original dataset collected through a web-survey in Germany and the United Kingdom at the end of 2014 and beginning of 2015, countries selected on the basis of their citizens' different attitudes towards the EU. The individual level data are analyzed both through bivariate correlations and ordinal logistic regression.

The first section of this article provides the conceptual framework and reviews literature, which discusses two things: why democratic innovations are necessary and important for contemporary democratic systems and which developments urged the EU to implement such mechanisms. This is also where we formulate theoretical-driven hypotheses to be tested empirically at a later stage. The second section includes the research design, providing details about case selection (according to the Most Different System Design), data collection and variable operationalization. The following section presents and interprets the empirical findings with an emphasis on the similarities and differences between the two countries. The conclusions summarize the main results, shed light on the theoretical and empirical implications of this study, and discuss avenues for further research.

The ECI and the image about the EU

According to Article 10.3 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) every European citizen has the right to participate in the democratic life of the EU. In addition to voting in elections for the European Parliament, the ECI – introduced through the Treaty of Lisbon – provides a supplementary possibility to participate. The ECI falls under the category of citizens' initiatives, a bottom-up type of direct democracy that presupposes an initiative coming from

individuals, interest groups, or organizations (Schiller 2002; Beramendi et al. 2008; Altman 2011). Such initiatives allow citizens to get involved in the legislative process, since it entails the right to propose new laws or the modification of existing laws to the general public. The ECI is an agenda-setting (or policy-shaping) initiative because it gives European citizens the right to place an issue on the agenda for legislative consideration of the European Commission without legally binding pressure on the latter (Glogowski & Maurer 2013, p.9).

It can be used in six ways: to get the EU to do something new, to stop the EU from doing something, to make current EU legislation better, to use the ECI as an additional element in an attempt to influence European policy making, to use the ECI to build broad alliances and networks across Europe and finally to make individual citizens or groups of citizens better known in the public sphere (Kaufmann 2012, pp.17–23). However, the ECI should not be seen and used as a kind of blockage instrument that hinders EU legislation, but rather as a proactive instrument that encourages citizens to actively engage with European legislation and projects (Franzius & Preuss 2012, p.27). The successful launch of the ECI must meet several criteria: a minimum number of one million signatures from citizens living in at least one quarter of the current 28 Member States (or at least 0.2 per cent of the EU population to be represented in the initiative) and the proposal to the Commission should neither fall outside the framework of the Commission's powers nor to be against the values of the Union (Articles 3-11, TEU).

Although the difficulty to meet these criteria and the weakness of the ECI as a policy instrument may discourage citizen involvement (Bouza Garcia & Greenwood 2012; ECI Support Centre 2014), there are theoretical reasons to expect that the ECI may influence the image citizens have about the EU. These reasons refer to the responsiveness and inclusiveness of the EU system and are explained in detail in the following lines.

How can the ECI improve the (public) image of the EU?

The simplest possible way in which the ECI can positively influence the attitude of citizens towards the EU is its success, i.e. proposals end up in legislation or policies. On the contrary, if initiatives fail the ECI could have a demotivating effect and deepen the view that citizens' voices do not count in the EU. While such empirical arguments are difficult to test given the short life of the ECI and limited number of initiatives, its potential effects are not related to the outcome but to the process. There are four interconnected mechanisms which could in

theory lead to a better image about the EU when the ECI is implemented: 1) establishing a European demos; 2) creating networks across borders and rising media awareness for European topics, 3) strengthening the democratic system of the EU and 4) enhancing the political inclusion of European citizens.

First, the ECI can address the problem of popular legitimacy in the EU polity. Bohman (2007, p.139) argues that popular legitimacy is achieved when people “have genuine opportunities to shape or assent” to reforms. The ECI helps at the creation of a demos is constructed and therefore the missing demos of the EU is not a problem as long as there are efforts to create the structures and institutions which enable its creation (Hatton 2014, p.240). The ECI is likely to provide the institutional channels for increased participation and communication of European citizens that activate a bottom-up building of the European demos. The possibility to discuss important European issues collectively across borders and to act on shared interests with an increased number of participants could lead to a more attracting sense of a demos (Glogowski & Maurer 2013; Hatton 2014). Furthermore, rather than relying on a single demos as necessary precondition for democracy, the “multiple demoi thesis” (Bohman 2007; Cheneval & Schimmelfennig 2013; Hatton 2014) explains that manifold and overlapping demoi could serve as base for the transnational democratic system of the EU. Citizens would have different sources for identification and different membership criteria, based on different preconditions. Thus, the ECI as a collective pan-European tool for direct participation could serve as a mechanism that stimulates a European demos or as a platform where a European demos could be fostered. Thereby, the importance of transnational networks and the media as a major source of information for many citizens cannot be underestimated. The role of the media is fundamental in the process of demos formation and without transnational networks the ECI could hardly be conducted (Glogowski & Maurer 2013, p.22).

Second, transnational networks are among the most important forms of organization for a civil society with transnational and issue-specific identity. As these networks do not identify (only) national but unified in their relationship to a joint issue, they transcend national borders and communicational barriers through deliberation. The ECI as initiator of transnational networks could serve as stimulating mechanism for pan-European deliberation between the citizens and lead to decision-making processes, identification with a European political community and the formation of European public opinion. Through all these the EU

becomes more appealing to citizens and fulfills another necessary precondition of democracy (Habermas 2001, p.17). In line with these arguments, earlier research indicates that the ECI has worked in practice as a tool for organized civil society in the EU (De Clerck-Sachsse 2012; Bouza Garcia & Greenwood 2014). At the same time, the ECI may provide an appropriate platform to start cross border reporting of EU issues without national bias as citizens already act collectively and unified in their interest-related identity (Glogowski & Maurer 2013, p.21). In this way, a shared sphere of communication through the media would be opened up for the citizens.

Third, the ECI can contribute to the improvement of the institutional design of the EU democratic system. Earlier studies concluded that the ECI may make European civil society more diverse, representative and oriented to the public sphere (Bouza Garcia & Del Río Villar 2012). Through its agenda-setting function the ECI is an appropriate tool for the citizens to engage with the European project and to ensure that their voices are heard by the body initiating legislation in the EU. In this sense, citizens could feel empowered when they are allowed to put forward their own legislative proposals. By providing a platform for collective communication and action across (European? Member State?) borders, the ECI can endow a sense of community and solidarity, which then again makes the voice of the citizens more substantial when it comes to EU policy decisions (Franzius & Preuss 2012, pp.35–36). At the same time, the use of the ECI could partly address the issue of democratic deficit in the EU. It could add legitimacy to its political system and thereby making its decisions more ponderous without inflicting protest, anti-European movements or dissatisfaction and alienation among its citizens.

Finally, the ECI provides the avenue for a better and deeper inclusion of European citizens in the EU political process. The concept of political inclusion in the literature, traditionally refers to how minority groups or immigrants are included in national political systems. Wolbrecht and Hero (2005) view democratic inclusion as influence, representation and incorporation of various social groups into the political process. While inclusion can be achieved through political parties or voting, full access to participation and representation in important decision-making processes and institutions are important signs for full democratic inclusion in politics (Schmidt et al. 2002). The ECI has the ability to strengthen the inclusion of the citizens in the EU political process by providing an additional participatory tool. Political inclusion is also related to the feeling of being heard by the authorities and the ECI

could provide such a feeling since the Commission is expected to react to successful initiatives (Kaldur et al. 2011). In this context, the ECI can partly address the criticisms about the EU being distant from its citizens and being characterized by democratic deficit. If citizens use it as a channel to express their opinions and influence the EU political system, they are likely to have confidence in the possibilities provided by the ECI. At the same time, they may also have a positive image about the EU since the latter provided them a tool to get involved and participate in the legislative process, to make their voice heard and eventually point to changes they would like to see. This is a signal that the EU has the intention to improve and react to the needs of its citizens.

In light of all these arguments, the ECI is likely to enhance among citizens feelings of empowerment, belief that their voice can be heard, and confidence in the EU political process. These are the reasons for which we expect knowledge about the ECI and the willingness to use it to have a positive effect on citizens' image about the EU. By strengthening democracy at the EU level and having a potential impact to limit the democratic deficit, the ECI can improve the way in which citizens see the EU. In this paper image stands for citizens' general perceptions and opinions about the EU. Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) argued that a country image is the sum of perceptions, associations, stereotypes, or schemas. An image consists of a diffuse or general impression and a set of feelings and beliefs about a whole field, and it is less about details or particular facts.

H1: Citizens who know about the ECI have a better image about the EU than the rest.

H2: Citizens who are willing to use the ECI have a better image about the EU than the rest.

The direction of the hypothesized relationships should be briefly clarified. In other words why we expect attitudes towards the ECI to lead to a positive image about the EU and not the other way around. The basis of our argument lies in the difference between specific and diffuse support (Easton 1965). On the one hand, specific support is object-specific; meaning that it involves knowledge about policies, actions and decisions of the authorities. On the other hand, the diffuse support derives from experiences that over time produce general attitudes towards a political system. As illustrated by this conceptualization, the sequence of occurrence is usually from the specific to the diffuse support. Moreover, there is empirical evidence that indicates how specific support, as a policy-based evaluation, leads to diffuse

support, as more of a normative evaluation. In their study Scheb II and Lyons (1999) show how citizens who have specific knowledge about the Supreme Court are also likely to show greater support for and better opinions about the Court. According to their conclusions, the relationship is in theory possible the other way around, but much weaker and rather unlikely in reality.¹

Control variables

We control for the effect of ECI on the image about the EU when ‘the usual suspects’ to produce such an effect are kept constant. There are theoretical reasons to believe that four determinants may play an important role in shaping citizens’ attitudes towards the EU: 1) seeing the EU as a democratic system, 2) feeling represented in the EU, 3) perceiving that EU represents citizens’ interests, and 4) EU citizenship. To begin with, citizens vest confidence in political institutions when “they believe they operate effectively according to democratic principles of justice and impartiality” (Newton 2006, p.86). Accordingly, those citizens who consider the EU to be a democratic institution are likely to consider the EU as legitimate since legitimacy of political institutions is largely based on trust (Christensen & Lægreid 2002). While these arguments refer explicitly to specific support (Easton 1965), they are also valid when speaking about the diffuse support (i.e. image about the EU). In this sense, citizens who trust the democratic processes within the EU politics are less likely to feel alienated by and have a negative image about the EU.

Second, legitimacy refers to the belief that the existing political order is right; but to what extent the political system is right also depends on how well it manages to represent the citizens (Thomassen & Schmitt 1999, p.9). Representation is the an essence of democracy because it enables citizens to forward their interests and needs at political level (Pitkin 1967; Manin 1997; Przeworski et al. 1999). At the same time, representation means responsiveness of the political system towards citizens, a reflection of their demands into policies (Pitkin 1967; Thomassen 1994). Consequently, citizens who feel represented in the EU are likely to have a better image about it compared to those who do not feel represented. Third, closely related to representation is the feeling that the EU serves the

¹ Earlier research highlighted that specific support does not always lead to diffuse support (Iyengar 1980; Nicholson & Howard 2003). Our argument here does not contradict such findings but tries to convey the message that whenever the two types of support are related, there is a specific sequentiality with specific support coming first.

interests of its citizens.² In general, voting reflects the opinions and images citizens hold about which party could better serve their interests in office. When institutions and authorities are perceived as serving the general interest, then it is also likely that citizens will have a good image about them.

Fourth, creating an EU citizenry has the potential to create a positive image of the EU at an individual level. According to Scheuer (1999, p.26), “the growing together of a political community depends at least as much on peoples self-perceptions and identifications as on the provision of rights of citizenship or on predominant modes of government”. While the EU can grant only particular citizenship rights, the creation of citizenry depends on whether individuals develop a sense of belonging and identification. Those citizens who do so are likely to have more positive attitudes towards the political system in which they activate compared to those individuals who do not identify with a broader community. In addition to these four determinants, we also test for the potential effect of age, gender, and education in shaping citizens’ attitudes towards the EU.

Research design

To empirically test the hypotheses we use a comparative approach for which we selected Germany and the United Kingdom (UK). The two countries were chosen on the basis of two variables; the differing attitudes of their citizens towards the EU on the one hand and of their relative importance for the EU on the other. According to the 2014 Autumn Eurobarometer, in the UK 30% of the population had a positive image of the EU, 35% a neutral image, and 32% a negative image. Only Greece (44% negative), Cyprus (38% negative) and Austria (36% negative) had a more negative view about the EU. Recent developments indicate that the UK will hold a referendum in 2017 regarding the possibility to leave the EU. In contrast, 38% of the German respondents had a positive image of the EU, 41% a neutral image, and 20% a negative image. There are only few countries, e.g. Poland (61% positive), Romania (59%) and Ireland (53%), who had an even better image of the EU. On the other hand, the countries were chosen due to the special roles they play in the EU. Throughout decades both countries shaped the EU developments and significantly influenced the content of treaties.

² The conceptual line between representation and pursuing general interests is relatively thin. In practice, people see the two things as being different. For the respondents included in this study the correlation between these two variables is 0.67 in Germany and 0.61 in the UK.

The data for our study comes from a web survey conducted between November 2014 and January 2015 in the two countries. Since there was no available individual level data to reflect both the knowledge and willingness to use the ECI (e.g. Eurobarometers never asked the two questions together), we developed a questionnaire that included all variables specified in this study. The web survey included only multiple-choice answers with five-point ordinal scales and respondents had the possibility to skip questions; on average, the completion time was approximately five minutes. The survey used identical questionnaires in English and German and was shared via e-mail and social networks in both countries. In total, 457 respondents filled out the questionnaire: 240 (completion rate 92%) in Germany and 217 (completion rate 88%) in the UK. The sample is not probability representative at country level and includes mainly young and highly educated respondents. The age group between 18 and 25 is overrepresented with 49% of the respondents in Germany and almost 60% in the UK. At the same time, 91% of the German and 93% of the British respondents have their A-Levels or higher. The gender distribution is relatively equal with women representing 48% of the respondents in Germany and 43% in the UK. Results cannot be generalized to the broader population but they remain illustrative for a particular segment of the population.

Variable operationalization and methodology

Each variable corresponds to a question in the questionnaire. The dependent variable of this article is the image about the EU, measured as the answer provided to the following question “Do you have a rather positive or rather negative image of the EU?” Available answers were coded on a five point ordinal scale and range from “definitely negative” (0) to “definitively positive” (4). The knowledge about the ECI (H1) is operationalized as the answer to the question: “Have you heard about the European Citizens Initiative?” Possible answers were dichotomous (“yes” coded 1 and “no” coded 0). In the online survey, the respondents who provided a negative answer to this question were taken to a short informative text describing the ECI. Thus, irrespective of their knowledge about the ECI, all respondents could answer the question about the willingness to use it. The latter (H2) is measured through the answers provided to the question “Would you sign a European Citizens Initiative on any topic?” Possible answers were recorded on a three-point ordinal scale: “no” (0), “maybe” (1), and “yes” (2).

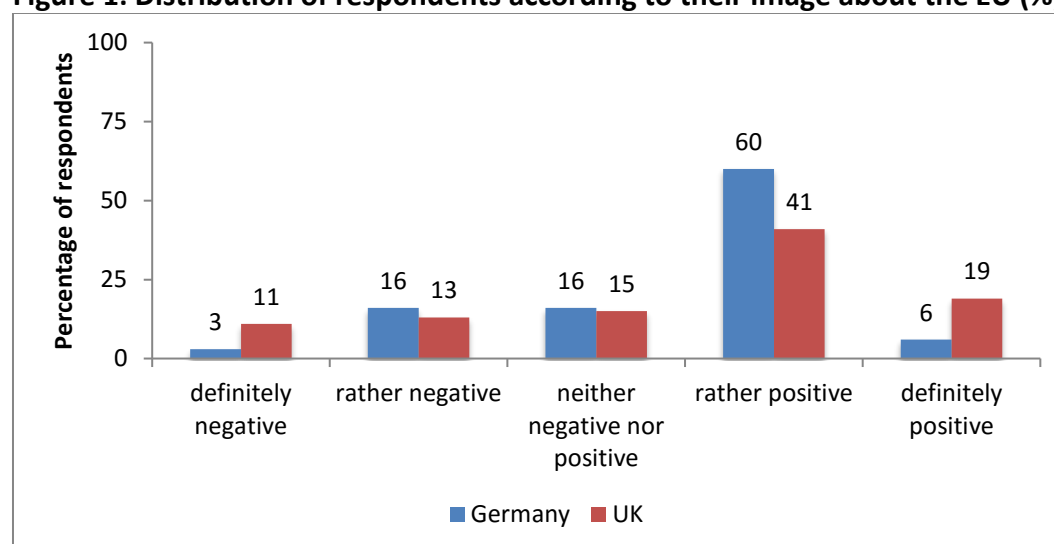
Democratic perception about the EU is operationalized through the question “Overall, in your opinion, how democratic is the EU?” Available answers range from “not at all democratic” to “completely democratic” and were coded on a 0-4 ordinal scale. The variable about how represented respondents feel in the EU corresponds to the question: “How well-represented do you feel in the EU?” Possible answers were also coded on a five-point ordinal scale having at extremes “not at all” (0) and “very well” (4). The variable about interests of citizens was operationalized through the question “In your opinion, to what extent does the EU serve the interests of its citizens?” with answers ranging from “not at all” (0) to “completely” (4). The EU citizenship variable was operationalized with the question “Do you consider yourself to be an EU citizen?” where available answers range from “not at all” (0) to “completely” (4). The three socio-demographic variables were operationalized as follows: age in years at the moment of survey, gender as a dichotomous variable (1=female, 2=male), and education as country sensitive. Both German and British respondents had six answer possibilities on an ordinal scale to name their level of education, with values starting from “Hauptschulabschluss” (Germany) and “GCSE level education” (UK) coded with 0. “Hochschulabschluss” coded with 4 was the highest level of education in the German questionnaire, “Degree or Graduate education” coded with 5 was the highest in the British.

The relationships between variables are in a first phase tested through bivariate correlations (non-parametric since all variables are ordinal). This reveals the strength and direction of relationships but does not shed light on causality. To identify the latter, we use multivariate statistical analysis (ordinal logistic regression) to see the explanatory power of the independent variables. Before running the regression analysis we have checked for multicollinearity. There correlation between any of the variables in either of the countries is not very high; the largest value is 0.67m between how well citizens feel represented by the EU and how the EU serves the interests of the citizens; all other values are considerably lower than this. More important for the discussion at the end of the paper, the correlations between the determinants for which we control and the knowledge or willingness to use the ECI are low or very low. The highest value is 0.19 (UK) and 0.20 (Germany), both statistically significant at 0.01 for EU citizenship.

The limited role of the ECI

The distribution of respondents on the dependent variable of this study, i.e. image about the EU (Figure 1) in Germany and the UK reveals important differences. For example, 3% of the German respondents have a completely negative image about the EU, while in the UK this answer has been given by 11% of the respondents. Furthermore, 60% of the German respondents have a rather positive image about the EU compared to 41% of the British respondents. However, when it comes to the category of respondents with a very good image about the EU, the results are somewhat counterintuitive. In the UK, 19% of the respondents, the second largest answer group, fall in this category compared to only 6% in Germany. If we cumulate the percentages for the two answers that reflect positive image about the EU (rather positive and definitely positive), we observe a small difference: 66% in Germany and 60% in the UK. This finding is in line with the distribution from the 2014 Eurobarometer (with a probability representative sample) where the difference was of 8 percentage points in favor of Germany. As a final note, the distribution in the extreme categories both in Germany and the UK are quite balanced: 3 and 6% in Germany and 11 and 19% in the UK. There are significantly more British respondents being placed in these categories (30%) compared to Germany (9%).

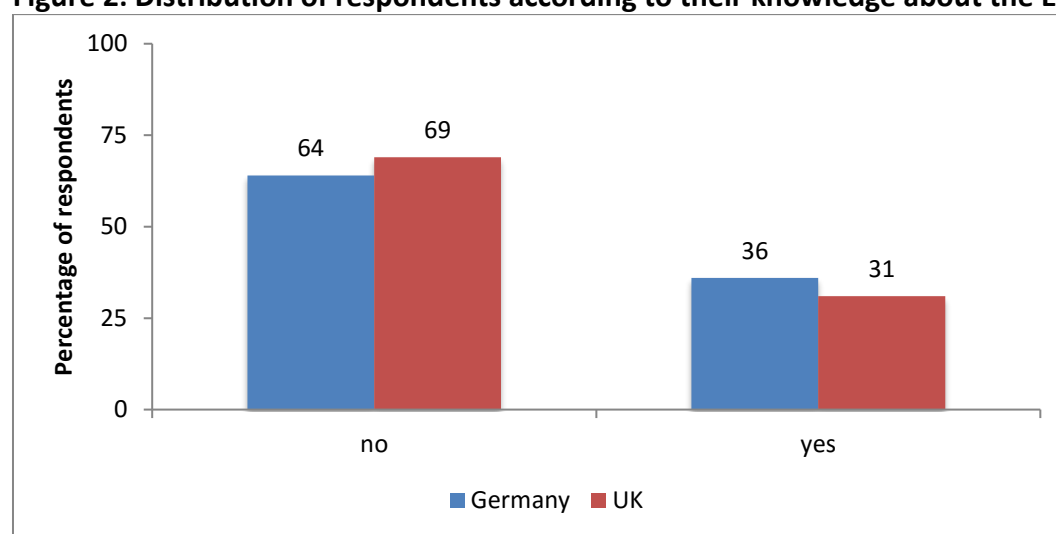
Figure 1: Distribution of respondents according to their image about the EU (%)



The distribution of respondents according to their knowledge about the ECI (Figure 2) is fairly similar between Germany and the UK. In Germany 36% have heard about it, while in the UK 31% respondents answered affirmatively. The low percentages are somewhat unexpected given the profile of many respondents in the survey. Usually, the young and highly educated are inclined to acquire information and are exposed to various sources. One

of these sources, and a very important one for information about the ECI, is Internet where young people are considerably more active (and skilled) compared to those from older generations. The very similar distribution shows that among the respondents included in this study the knowledge about the ECI is not influenced by country specific factors, e.g. different media coverage or a different relation of the state government with the EU. Looking at the aggregate percentages from Figures 1 and 2, where most respondents have a positive image about the EU and know nothing about the ECI, it appears to be no relationship between the two variables.

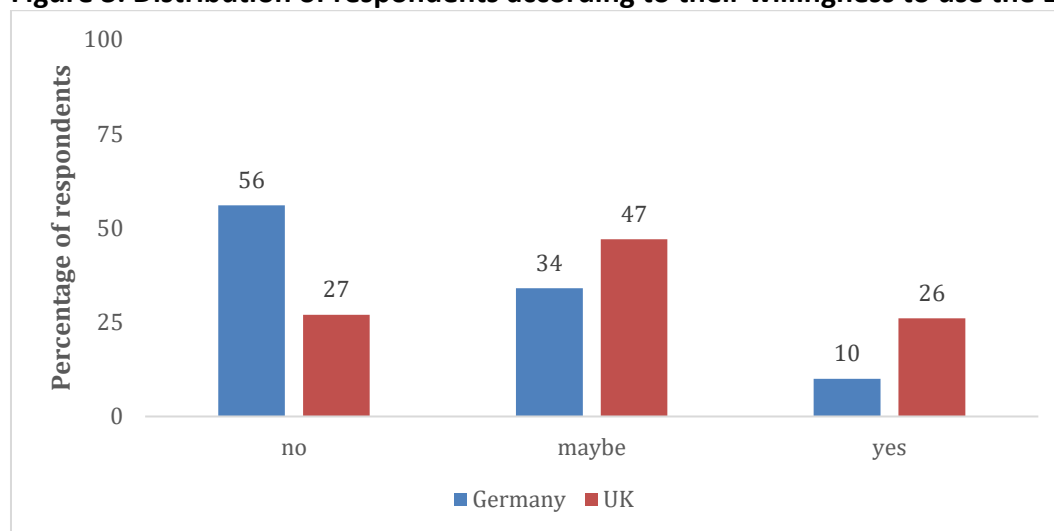
Figure 2: Distribution of respondents according to their knowledge about the ECI (%)



The distribution of respondents on the variable about the willingness to use the ECI (Figure 3) is surprising in light of the differences registered for the previous two variables. Although respondents in Germany have a slightly better image about the EU and more of them heard about the ECI, they are more reluctant to use it compared to the British respondents. The individual level correlation between knowledge about the ECI and willingness to use it reflect this ambiguity: it is no relationship among the German respondents (-0.01) and a weak negative relationship among UK respondents (-0.07) indicating that persons who know less about the ECI are slightly more willing to use it than the rest. These results contradict earlier arguments according to which the ECI tends to target those citizens who are already convinced, having biases and being a form of functional representation. When asked whether they would use the ECI on any topic only 10% said yes, and 56%, more than half of the respondents answered negatively. In the UK, 47% of the respondents are indecisive and say maybe they would use it, and the rest are split almost evenly between a clear decision to

use it (26%) and being against it (27%). These general observations blur even further the picture of the relationship between the ECI and the image about the EU. To draw substantial conclusions and to avoid ecological fallacy, we complement these observations with individual level analyses.

Figure 3: Distribution of respondents according to their willingness to use the ECI (%)



The bivariate correlations (Table 1) confirm at individual level the poor linkage between attitudes towards the ECI (knowledge and desire to use it) and towards the EU (image) observed at aggregate level. Due to the small and non-probabilistic sample, generalizations to the entire population is not possible; under these circumstances, the reported statistical significance has to be seen only as an indicator for no accidental relationships. This is the reason for which we focus more on the strength and direction of empirical evidence. There is weak empirical support for H1 in both countries. According to the values of the correlation coefficients – 0.11 in Germany and 0.13 in the UK, none of them statistically significant – there is a weak tendency of those citizens who know about the ECI to have a better image about the EU compared to respondents who have no knowledge about the ECI. For H2, the correlation coefficients in the two countries differs greatly. In the German case, the empirical findings reveal that there is practically no relationship (0.03) between the willingness to use the ECI and the image about the EU, while for the British respondents the relationship is rather weak (0.18, statistically significant at the 0.05 level) and goes in the hypothesized direction.

Table 1: The results of the bivariate analysis

Correlation between the image about the EU and...	Germany		United Kingdom	
	Correlation coefficient	N	Correlation coefficient	N
ECI knowledge (H1)	0.11	237	0.13	210
ECI willingness to use (H2)	0.03	211	0.18*	190
EU democratic	0.46**	237	0.66**	210
EU representative	0.49**	230	0.63**	198
EU serves interests	0.61*	230	0.62*	198
EU citizenship	0.48**	237	0.70**	217
Gender	-0.01	223	-0.10	188
Age	-0.05	218	-0.11	182
Education	0.01	223	0.10	190

Notes: The coefficients are rank correlations (Spearman).

**significant at 0.01; *significant at 0.05

All other correlations between potential determinants are much stronger and statistically significant than H1 and H2. As a general note, the values of the correlation coefficients are higher in the UK than in Germany. The correlation between how well respondents consider the EU to serve the interests of the citizens and the image about the EU is the strongest among German respondents (0.61, statistically significant at 0.05). In the British case, the highest value of the correlation coefficient is for how much respondents identified with the EU (0.70, statistically significant at 0.01). The correlations for the perception of EU as democratic are significant at the 0.01 level and they are strong (0.46) for German respondents and very strong (0.66) for British respondents. Accordingly, there is a high tendency of citizens who see the EU as democratic to have a better image about the EU compared to the rest of respondents. A similar situation is for how well respondents feel represented by the EU with significant correlations at the 0.01 level in both cases. There is also strong empirical evidence indicating that respondents who consider the EU to serve the interests of the citizens (0.61 in Germany and 0.62 in the UK) and the identification with the EU (0.48 in Germany and 0.70 in the UK) are positively correlated with the image about the EU. The socio-demographic variables do not correlate with the image about the EU in Germany. In the UK, there are weak correlations indicating that female, younger, and better educated respondents are likely to have a more positive image about the EU than the rest.

To test for the effect of the ECI variables on image about the EU when the other determinants are held constant we run an ordinal logistic regression (Table 2) with the most negative answer as reference category. There are two models for each sample, one without and one with socio-demographic control variables. All four models are quite a good fit for the data, the values of the pseudo R^2 being slightly higher for the UK respondents. The

results of the regression analysis show a somewhat different picture than the bivariate analysis and complicate the interpretation. When all other variables are constant, the knowledge about the ECI (H1) has a negative effect on the image about the EU. Those respondent who heard about the ECI are approximately 1.5 times less likely (0.76, we interpret the reciprocals for all OR lower than 1) to have a positive image about the EU compared to those respondents who know nothing about the ECI. The situation is fairly similar when controlling for age, gender, and education. These effects go against the hypothesized relationship. In the UK, there is no effect of knowledge about the ECI but when controlling for the three socio-demographic variables the effect is positive; there is weak support for H2 only additional controls are introduced. None of these effects is statistically significant.

The empirical evidence goes also against H2 among the German respondents. Citizens who are willing to use the ECI are less likely to have a good image about the EU than those who do not intend to make use of this participation tool. In the UK there is weak support for the hypothesized relationship and respondents with the desire to use the ECI are 1.2 times (or 1.3 times when socio-demographics are controlled for) more likely to have a better image compared to the individuals who refuse to use it. None of these effects is statistically significant.

In contrast, the four determinants for which we controlled have strong or very strong effects, all statistically significant. For example, the German respondents who feel that the EU serves their interests are more than four times more likely to have a positive image about the EU than those who believe the EU does not serve their interests. To use also an example from the UK, respondents who identify with the EU are almost three times (2.79, significant at 0.01) more likely to have a positive image about the EU compared to those who do not identify with the EU. The inclusion of socio-demographic variables rarely changes something when it comes to these effects. Among these controls, education appears to have a small effect in Germany and gender in the UK (none of these statistical significant), the latter being consistent with the observation from the bivariate analysis.

Table 2: Ordinal regression models for the image about the EU (odds-ratios)

	Germany		United Kingdom	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
ECI knowledge (H1)	0.76 (0.26)	0.80 (0.28)	1.01 (0.32)	1.23 (0.43)
ECI willingness to use (H2)	0.90 (0.21)	0.89 (0.22)	1.20 (0.25)	1.32 (0.30)
EU democratic	2.08** (0.46)	1.96** (0.45)	2.48** (0.56)	2.69** (0.66)
EU representative	1.60* (0.36)	1.66* (0.39)	1.61* (0.36)	1.58 (0.38)
EU serves interests	4.18** (1.13)	4.27** (1.18)	1.77* (0.46)	2.13** (0.59)
EU citizens	1.67** (0.26)	1.63** (0.26)	2.79** (0.49)	2.64** (0.52)
Gender		0.98 (0.33)		1.71 (0.57)
Age		0.91 (0.16)		0.96 (0.18)
Education		1.33 (0.26)		1.04 (0.12)
N	209	196	185	167
Pseudo R ²	0.32	0.31	0.36	0.38
LR Chi ²	155.73	144.19	197.73	168.12

Note: Standard errors are reported in parentheses.

**significant at 0.01; *significant at 0.05

Discussion and Conclusion

This study tried to empirically assess the relationship between the ECI and the image about the EU among citizens from Germany and UK. None of the samples was probabilistic and representative at national level and instead included young and highly educated respondents. The empirical results reveal that the ECI is a bit far from the great expectations that came along with its implementation. Knowledge about the ECI seems to have limited effect on respondents' image about the EU. While the bivariate correlations indicated a weak positive relationship between these variables in both countries, the regression analysis revealed a more complex picture. In Germany, there is a negative effect of knowledge about the ECI on image about the EU when controlling for common determinants identified in the literature. In the UK, there is no effect when controlling for the same determinants. Similarly, the willingness of the respondents to use the ECI has little impact on the image about the EU. In Germany, there is almost no correlation between the two variables and the regression analysis indicates a negative effect when controlling for other determinants. In

the UK, the correlation is weak and in the hypothesized direction, whereas the regression analysis confirms the existence of a weak and positive effect.

The determinants for which we controlled were not only the ones used in previous research, but also related to the issues expected to be enhanced by the ECI. In this sense, the existence of a channel for direct participation and involvement was likely to trigger a better image about the EU because citizens feel that the political system is more responsive to their needs (i.e. more democratic), seek for a better, is open to citizens' opinions (and implicitly pursues their interests). All these are reasons for which we wanted to contrast these indirect benefits of the ECI to the direct attitudes of citizens, i.e. how democratic they perceive the EU, if they feel represented, if their interests are served, and how much they identify with the EU. Since the effect of the ECI was limited and that of the direct attitudes was high or very high, it results that the ECI is not perceived as a possible mechanism to enhance and promote such traits among the respondents included in our study.

These observations lead to several theoretical and empirical implications of our analysis. First, in addition to problems of design and implementation, the ECI does not appear to convey a clear message to citizens. In theory, the ECI is expected to bring the European political system closer to citizens and make the latter perceive the EU as being more democratic and more responsive to their needs. Indirectly, this shapes a better image of the EU. The empirical results show that this does not happen in reality. Citizens do not see an immediate link between the ECI and the values it is expected to promote and this was reflected in the poor correlations between them. If that is the case, there is a danger that the ECI might be used as a negative tool, to hinder EU decision-making process. Equally important, knowing and being willing to use the ECI have little effect (or contrasting effect as in Germany) when controlling for the attitudes it is expected to enhance. One explanation for this situation could be the poor advertisement of the ECI. In this sense, our survey clearly pointed out a general lack of knowledge about the ECI. A better sales pitch, with emphasis on the advantages provided by this tool, may bring positive reactions among citizens. This path is consistent with our observation that the ECI triggers some effects in the more Eurosceptic environment of the UK compared to Germany.

Furthermore, this study indicated almost no relationship between knowledge about the ECI and willingness to use it. More puzzling, among the British respondents there is a slight tendency of those who knew nothing about the ECI to use it after they were briefly

informed about it. This observation further substantiates the idea that the ECI is poorly promoted and citizens who have already heard about it are not persuaded to make use. At the same time, it may be the perception that the ECI does not fulfill the functions that are advertised with it, being instead merely a petition. Highly educated people are likely to be more analytical when they are presented with new avenues for participation and thus become more critical towards it. In that respect, an emphasis on the benefits that the ECI could bring to citizens may foster willingness to use it and, indirectly, contribute to a better image about the EU. Furthermore, there are also difficulties (related to the requirements, design and application) to launch and implement the ECI, which is more a collective rather than an individual effort. As soon as people are aware about shortcomings there are two contradictory effects: some continue to believe in its idea and strive for its use (if they remain optimistic), while others are demotivated.

While these implications have to be considered in the limited context of our study, they also set important grounds for further research. To begin with, it is worthy to investigate if the trends identified here hold for representative samples in a larger number of EU member states. Since our results indicated that the ECI alone does not foster a positive image about the EU, further research could check whether particular attitudes can be combined with knowledge about or willingness to use the ECI to provide positive effects on the EU. This will allow for a better understanding about how the ECI could function or how it could be better promoted to reach the EU citizens.

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